03/22/24 • BIG FOOD • BIG CHEMICAL › NEWS

# 95% of These Fruits and Vegetables Tested Positive for Pesticides

*The latest edition of the Environmental Working Group's annual consumer's guide reveals that almost three-fourths of non-organic fruits and vegetables sampled contained traces of toxic pesticides while the "dirty dozen" — including strawberries and spinach — tested at levels closer to 95%.*

**By Common Dreams**

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**By Olivia Rosane**

The latest edition of an annual consumer's guide published Wednesday reveals that almost three-fourths of non-organic fruits and vegetables sampled contained traces of toxic pesticides while the "dirty dozen" — including strawberries and spinach — tested at levels closer to 95%.

Scientists with the Environmental Working Group (EWG) document in their new report, "2024 Shopper's Guide to Pesticides In Produce," that four out of five of the most frequently detected pesticides found on the twelve most-contaminated produce items were fungicides that could have serious health impacts.

"There's data to suggest that these fungicides can disrupt the hormone function in our body," EWG senior scientist Alexa Friedman told Common Dreams, adding that the chemicals had "been linked to things like worse health outcomes" and "impacts on the male reproductive system."

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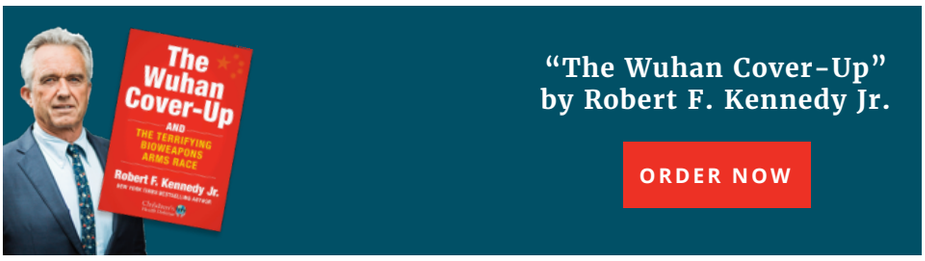
The four fungicides detected on the Dirty Dozen produce were fludioxonil, pyraclostrobin, boscalid and pyrimethanil.

Two of these — fludioxonil and pyrimethanil — were also found in the highest concentrations of any pesticide detected.

The annual Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen lists are based on a review of U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Food and Drug Administration data.




This year, EWG looked at results from 47,510 samples of 46 fruits and vegetables.

2024's Dirty Dozen list is similar to previous years, with strawberries, spinach, and a trio of hearty greens — kale, collard greens and mustard greens — once again taking the top three spots. The full list is as follows:

1. Strawberries.
2. Spinach.
3. Kale, collard and mustard greens.
4. Grapes.
5. Peaches.
6. Pears.
7. Nectarines.
8. Apples.
9. Bell and hot peppers.
10. Cherries.
11. Blueberries.
12. Green beans.

The four fungicides were found on the fruits and vegetables for which new data was available this year — blueberries, green beans, peaches and pears — for some of them at high levels.

"One reason we might see fungicides in high concentrations compared to other types of pesticides are that fungicides are often sprayed on the produce later in the process," Friedman said.

Farmers frequently apply fungicides after harvest to protect crops from mildew or mold on the way to the grocery store.

Beyond fungicides, testing also turned up the neonicotinoids acetamiprid and imidacloprid, which harm bees and other pollinators and have been associated with damage to the development of children's nervous systems.

Testing also revealed the pyrethroid insecticides cypermethrin and bifenthrin. While there are fewer studies on these pesticides, existing research suggests they may also harm children's brains.

More than 1 in 10 pear samples tested positive for diphenylamine, which is currently banned in the European Union over cancer concerns.

Most of the pesticides detected in the Dirty Dozen are legal, but one exception is acephate, an organophosphate insecticide that is essentially prohibited for

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use on green beans but is still found on them.

One sample tested positive for levels 500 times the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) legal limit.

EWG found that nearly 75% of non-organic fruits and vegetables tested were contaminated with pesticides.

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However, nearly 65% of the conventional items on the Clean Fifteen list were pesticide-free. This year's Clean Fifteen are:

1. Sweet corn.
2. Avocados.
3. Pineapple.
4. Onions.
5. Papaya.
6. Sweet peas.
7. Asparagus.
8. Honeydew melon.
9. Kiwi.
10. Cabbage.
11. Watermelon.
12. Mushrooms.
13. Mango.
14. Sweet potatoes.
15. Carrots.

The Shopper's Guide is primarily geared toward helping consumers make informed choices as they choose between conventional and organic items, which may be more expensive or harder to find.

"We always recommend that people consume as many fruits and veggies as possible, whether they're organic or conventional," Friedman said.

But for people concerned about consuming pesticides, she added, EWG recommends "using the Shopper's Guide as a way to prioritize which fruits and vegetables to buy organic to reduce your pesticide exposure."

EWG recommends prioritizing organic versions of Dirty Dozen items.

As a whole, the EWG advocates for policymakers and regulators to do more to understand the real risks posed by pesticides and protect people from them.

"We still feel that there needs to be more studies that really focus on the health effects of these pesticides, specifically the pesticides that we found in high detection this year, so that we can better understand how these might impact health for susceptible populations, particularly for children," Friedman said.

She added that while many of the pesticides detected in tests were at or below legal limits set by the EPA, "legal doesn't always mean that they're safe for everyone."

In a 2020 study, for example, EWG researchers found that for nearly 90% of common pesticides, the EPA had failed to apply an extra margin of safety for children when setting limits, even though it is required to do so under the Food Quality Protection Act.

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Currently, the EPA has a chance to improve regulations as it rewrites a ban on chlorpyrifos on food, which was overturned by a court on a technicality.

It is also reviewing whether or not the pesticide dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate, or DCPA can be used safely after it acknowledged the "significant risks" it poses to human health.

EWG is also raising the alarm about a slate of new rules that some lawmakers may try to attach to the 2023 Farm Bill or other important legislation.

These proposed laws, such as the Agricultural Labeling Uniformity Act and the EATS Act, would prevent states or localities from setting additional pesticide regulations.

In September 2023, EWG joined with 184 other environmental groups in sending a letter to the House and Senate opposing such measures, which the groups argue take "decision-making out of the hands of those most impacted by pesticide use."

"States and localities are often in a much better position than the EPA to quickly assess risks, consider emerging evidence, and to make decisions to protect their unique local environments and communities including schools and childcare facilities, from toxic pesticides," the letter states.

"Undermining that authority would hamstring critical local efforts to address cancer and other human health risks, threats to water resources, and harms to pollinators and other wildlife."

*Originally published by Common Dreams.*

*Olivia Rosane is a staff writer for Common Dreams.*

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**Mark777**
a month ago

Does eating from this dirty dozen or clean 15 include Australia? It really angers me that there's barely any organic food sitting in our Coles, Woolworths, Aldi and IGA supermarkets. Most of what they sell is poison. When it comes to buying fruit, if I'm lucky, I may find some organic grapes or plums selling in Woolworths. Because most of what they sell is cheap poison, and because the healthy stuff is mega expensive, I'm forced to pick and choose and eat one small meal a day. Are you saying that if I buy conventional avocados, sweet corn and pineapple here in Australia that I should be safe from being poisoned?

1 0 Reply

**Greebo** → Mark777
a month ago

If it is not tested by a trustworthy lab, you cannot KNOW. However, it is likely that any spray on avocados will be discarded with their thick skins. That may depend on when they are sprayed & with what. The corn is probably GMO and it has the insecticide inside it. That still causes my esophagus and stomach to spasm painfully & expel it immediately, whether I cooperate or not. Not something I wish to test in public. Pineapple has a skin that seems more permeable than those of avocados but it may stop the spray from penetrating, if you skin it carefully. You may want to start sprouting fresh vegetable & growing strawberries in window boxes to insure that you have fresh greens and fruit. I manages one summer by raising 2 Swiss chard plants in 6 inch pots on the patio. I could harvest the outer leaves so the plans continued to produce all summer. The Rainbow chard has lovely colored stems that you can saute with butter & garlic for a lovely dish.

0 0 Reply

**Jerome Brooks**
a month ago

Will washing or rinsing still remove most of the harmful chemicals ? And if so, what is the best procedure for this. Is just rinsing them under cold water ok?

0 0 Reply

**hawaii50th**
a month ago

From the sounds of this article, people would be better off, and safer if we just don't buy anything grown in the States, since we have such a corrupt government, that will not ban the most dangerous chemicals, herbicides, and fertilizers for crops, and even for live stock. America is a very filthy place at the moment.

0 0 Reply

**April Scott**
a month ago

How can sweet corn be at the top of the list when all corn grown in the US is GMO?

0 0 Reply

**D$ Mc** → April Scott
a month ago

For pesticides... not for the genetic status of it. However, I too don't eat sweet corn unless it is organic for the same reason. GMO!

0 0 Reply

**Matt**

a month ago

I soak my blueberries in 2 cups of water with 2 tsp of baking soda.

0 0 Reply

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